

R 300835Z SEP 09  
FM AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2842  
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG

UNCLAS ST PETERSBURG 000121

DEPT FOR ECA, CA/FPP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [RS](#) [CVIS](#) [KFRD](#) [OEXC](#) [SCUL](#)

SUBJECT: KALININGRAD OUTREACH: DESPITE COOL RECEPTION, SOLID INTEREST  
IN AMERICA

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Consulate officers traveled to Kaliningrad recently for public diplomacy and consular outreach. Despite a cool reception at Kaliningrad's main university and amidst rumors of misdeeds associated with the collapse of the region's main airline, Conoffs managed to meet with hundreds of students, engage in extensive press activities, promote American values and culture, glean valuable information about the Summer Work and Travel experience among local students, and provide anti-fraud training at the airport. END SUMMARY.

-----  
CHILLY RECEPTION  
-----

12. (SBU) At Immanuel Kant State University, the head of the international office informed Conoff that only 65 of the 1000 Kant students participating in study-abroad programs go to the U.S. each year. Claiming that the US "is of no interest to the university," he said he was focused mainly on positioning Kant State University as a regional educational establishment, conducting the majority of its exchanges with Germany, Poland, Lithuania, France, and the UK. As for the U.S. Summer Work and Travel (SWT) program, he was disdainful; unprompted, he insisted that because he works for an educational institution, he had "no interest in any program that involves summer jobs." He warned us not to expect more than two or three students for the SWT presentation, but there were already 20 seated when Conoffs arrived, and another 18 trickled in during the two presentations on student visas and the SWT program. All students were visibly engaged, and the Q&A session confirmed that many were seriously interested both in studying in the US and in the SWT program. Despite the director's personal lack of interest, and what appeared to be a limited effort to spread the word on campus, the turnout was stronger than anticipated.

-----  
PAO MEETS THE PRESS, PROMOTES AMERICAN CULTURE  
-----

13. PAO gave six one-on-one TV, newspaper and radio interviews, covering everything from missile defense to culinary diplomacy. The most frequently asked question was whether the U.S. plans to open a consulate in Kaliningrad. Explaining the new, user-friendly U.S. visa application system for facilitating travel to the U.S., the PAO responded that opening a consulate in Kaliningrad would not be necessary.

14. In addition to media engagements, PAO gave three presentations to three very different audiences. His "Gogol in Hollywood" speech, preceded a showing of Danny Kaye's "The Inspector General" to an audience of over 30 people celebrating writer Nikolai Gogol's bicentennial. His "Celebrating 200 Years of U.S.-Russian Relations" presentation to 40 students and faculty at Kaliningrad State University was followed by an hour of questions and answers. PAO also made a stop at a local high school to speak on the "West Coast of the United States" and its influence on American English to a standing room-only group of 50 students.

-----  
HARD TIMES FOR SWT  
-----

15. (SBU) Conoff met with the two Summer Work and Travel agencies operating in Kaliningrad. International Exchange agency confirmed that their numbers for 2009 were far lower than 2008: 200 clients this year, versus 600 last. They do not expect a large uptick for the 2010 SWT season, but are hopeful that around 300 will apply. They also shared some students' recent experiences with us: in the past, it had been possible for participants to work two, even three jobs simultaneously, allowing them to earn good money. In 2009, however, most were faced with reduced hours, lower pay, and less job availability.

16. (SBU) The agents also explained why some applicants consider applying in Moscow instead of St. Petersburg: flights to the northern capital are much more expensive. Trains are more affordable, ostensibly, but since they cross international borders, forcing applicants to wait in St. Petersburg until they receive their passports from us through Pony Express, they are not always a cheaper option. Lastly, International Exchange informed us that they assist students with applications to other countries' SWT programs in Argentina, Costa Rica, Mauritius, Spain, France and Brazil - the competition is heating up.

17. (SBU) "Student Agency" is a one-woman outfit resurrected from the rubble of "Candidate," an SWT agency that collapsed last year after its main US source of jobs, Century Pools Management, went under and could not pay salaries to a number of SWT participants. Student Agency now works with Geovisions in the US to offer jobs in hotels, restaurants, pools, moving companies and fisheries. Its director plans to open a new office shortly and to hire a secretary. Her target for the 2010 SWT season is 30 to 50 students.

-----  
ALLEGED FOUL PLAY AT THE AIRPORT  
-----

18. (SBU) At Kaliningrad's Khrabrovo Airport Conoff conducted two training sessions - "Detecting Counterfeit U.S. Visas" and "Identifying Impostors" - with KD-Avia's nine-member document inspection team. The participants were receptive, responsive, and asked many questions during our two-hour session. Immediately after the training sessions, we met with the head of the visa and immigration service. After brief mention of the airline's recent financial troubles, the KD-Avia security service head began to inform us that airport authorities had just asked him to "pack up his office." He surmised that federal security organs were trying to chase him out of his job because of his "Israeli military background," and because of his unyielding stance when federal security agents had tried to push some of their contacts through security and onto flights, even though some carried illegitimate documents.

19. (SBU) The KD-Avia security chief wanted to continue the conversation and offered to share documents with us; we demurred. He later informed us that he and his staff quickly "went on vacation," citing rules that ostensibly prevented them from being fired while on leave, and conveying the hope that his staff would be reinstated once the company's financial crisis had passed.

110. (SBU) Note: KD-Avia company runs both the airline and the airport, although it currently is entering bankruptcy proceedings and has halted operation of all KD-Avia flights. The airport continues to service other Russian carriers and Air Baltic, the only foreign airline flying in and out of Kaliningrad. End note.

GWALTNEY